

MarketPlace

Bob Jimenez
Senior VP of Corporate Affairs
Cox Enterprises

DIFFERENT BY DESIGN

BOB JIMENEZ, '87
ON PRODUCT DIVERSIFICATION
AND EMPLOYEE INCLUSION,
CRITICAL COMPONENTS
OF CORPORATE SUCCESS

Real Money, Real Impact

Students Manage \$600,000
of Southern's Endowment

Future Focused

Capital Campaign Supports
New School of Business

Dean's Note



Stephanie Sheehan, '05, PhD
Dean, School of Business

In 2005, I was finishing my eighth year of a career at SunTrust (now Truist) as a regional vice president of marketing. It was a high time in the industry. The company was preparing to report nearly two billion in net income, a 26% increase over the prior year. It felt good to be part of that success, but I was searching for more. Yet God instructed me to stay—as a corporate missionary. Maslow would have suggested that I was aspiring for level five in his hierarchy of needs, where I could achieve my full potential. However, more simply, and richly, put: God was furthering my calling, and just as He called me to stay at SunTrust, He later called me to the mission field at Southern Adventist University for a project manager position in the School of Religion. An important component, essential to my core, had been missing. I needed to find it.

I transitioned from the downtown corporate rush hour to worship hour in Hackman Hall on Southern's campus. Six years later, God called me to a faculty position in the School of Business, where He blended my passion for mission with my business acumen and experience. It was an honor to join a team of professors who had hands-on business experience and a collective yearning to be about their Father's business.

Now, as dean since 2018, I have had the opportunity and privilege to watch our students and alumni find their callings and make enormous contributions in their earthly communities while winning eternal victories for the Kingdom of Heaven.

As I look at our approximately 450 business students and meet with students from other majors who are taking business classes, I'm inspired that they are going to find exactly what they are looking for: excellence in business education with an emphasis on His desire for us to view the marketplace with a missional mindset.

That's what this new School of Business magazine, *MarketPlace*, aims to highlight.

Enjoy.



Contents

14

Staffing Crisis

Since 2020, 400,000+ workers have left the long-term care field

4

News Briefs

Highlights from an eventful year of studies, service

5

Future Focused

Capital campaign supports new School of Business

8

Real Money, Real Impact

Students invest, manage \$600,000 of endowment

10

Different by Design

Product diversification, employee inclusion are key to success

18

Business as Mission

New graduate reflects on studies abroad and service learning

20

Count Your Blessings

Faculty member grateful for family's move from Lebanon

23

What We're Reading

Professors spend time between the pages, too



Dean: Stephanie Sheehan, '05, PhD
Editor: Ellen Hostetler
Creative Director: Lucas Patterson
Proofreader: Debbie Hicks, '91

Design: Emily Matthews, '13, and Lance Matthews, '13
Photographers: Nick Evenson, '06, Joseph Hyde, '20, and Tanya Musgrave, '11
Project Review: Marketing and University Relations



Southern's Enactus team celebrates after the national competition.

Enactus Team Places Third at National Competition

Enactus—a global organization featuring teams of social entrepreneurs who develop projects that use innovation and business principles to improve people's livelihoods—has representation at more than 300 colleges and universities in the United States. Southern's Enactus team, housed in the School of Business, finished third at a national competition in April, placing it in the top 1%.

Team projects for school year 2022-2023 included: The Akuna Soap Industry (providing soap production and marketing assistance for Zambian women and youth); BringIt (empowering student entrepreneurs); Tomorrowpreneurs (inspiring underserved kids in Chattanooga toward entrepreneurship); HIRE (creating a job network and training for the homeless in Chattanooga); and Illuminate Marketing (helping small businesses with marketing and promotion).

"We consider Enactus' organizational goals of helping others to be part of our Christian commission as well," said faculty adviser Michelle Doucoumes, '05 and '10. "Placing third at this competition is a huge accomplishment. I'm so proud of the students' hard work!"



Future Focused

SOUTHERN'S \$20 MILLION BUSINESS LEADERSHIP AND INNOVATION CAMPAIGN INCLUDES FUNDS FOR A NEW FACILITY AND ENDOWMENT TO HELP THE UNIVERSITY'S SECOND LARGEST ACADEMIC PROGRAM FLOURISH.

For

years, Southern Adventist University squeezed multiple departments into Brock Hall; the third floor alone houses three academic programs. As the School of Business has ballooned to nearly 450 students, the need for these faculty and students to have additional space is undeniable. Business is the largest academic area on campus without its own building.

"Just recently, I looked at the applications for the many programs within the School of Business; applications were up by 100 over where we were at this point last year," said President Ken Shaw, '80, EdD. "It's time for Southern to invest further into this important academic area."

Students Prepare Free Tax Returns for Qualifying Filers

For the 10th consecutive year, Southern's School of Business served the community through the IRS' Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program. Between January 30 and March 10, more than 20 students filed 345 returns for low-income, ESL, and disabled taxpayers—an increase of 80 returns compared to 2022. VITA is a federal program managed in Eastern Tennessee by the Urban League. Southern offers the service in Fleming Plaza under the supervision of Professor Mark Hyder, JD, site coordinator. Students are required to complete tax preparation certification at the advanced level before participating, and they earn service-learning credit or internship hours for their work.

Bloomberg Finance Lab Provides New Training

In August 2022, the School of Business opened its new Bloomberg Finance Lab, sponsored by AdventHealth. The lab houses 12 Bloomberg consoles, computers outfitted with software that allows students access to the same economic news, stock market indices, and financial information utilized by industry professionals. Faculty and students put this new technology to quick use. Under the guidance of Professor Joelle Akiki, PhD, select students participated in the Bloomberg Global Trading Challenge, an international competition with teams from 948 colleges and universities investing \$1 million in virtual money to see who could generate the highest relative profit and loss return. Southern's student team placed in the top 8% of 946 teams globally.

Taking Care of Business

After prayerfully seeking a solution, Southern launched the \$20 million School of Business Leadership and Innovation Campaign earlier this school year in support of a new building and program endowment. Thus far, more than \$16 million has been received and pledged toward this goal. In February, Southern held a land dedication ceremony, and at this fall's board meeting, it will break ground on the project.

As well as growing in student enrollment, the School of Business also has increased the quantity and quality of majors that it offers. Business students can currently choose between 16 different undergraduate and graduate programs. Each option is carefully crafted to equip students with the tools they will need to succeed professionally while simultaneously inspiring them with the eternal purpose of sharing Christ in their chosen field.

Southern's students thrive both in the classroom and the community. Business seniors regularly rank high nationally for the Educational Testing Service Major Field Test; in fact, they scored in the 95th percentile for 2022! SMARRT Fund students profitably invest real funds from Southern's endowment with the guidance of faculty advisers. Enactus team members compete globally to find ways to use business as a catalyst for positive social and environmental impact. Finance students even provide free tax-filing assistance to the local community.

Each time an academic area receives a new building or dramatic facility update, strong enrollment growth occurs. Prime examples in Southern's history include the Hulsey Wellness Center (School of Health and Kinesiology) and AdventHealth Hall (School of Nursing). With the completion of the new School of Business building, students will have not only more space to engage in learning, but also an improved visual and physical departmental identity.

Faculty will be able to feel confident that the quality of their facilities will finally mirror the quality of their curriculum and teaching. The new project will increase the School of Business's footprint from 9,000 to nearly 43,000 square feet. Features include state-of-the-art learning environments, a business innovations center, a SMARRT Fund finance lab, tech-driven classrooms, collaborative study areas, private study rooms, an auditorium, a large conference room, and dedicated space for student organizations, such as Enactus. Having all business classrooms under one roof will energize the students and give them the space necessary for team-building and collaboration.

"The business world continues to change," Shaw said. "Having a facility that allows our faculty to foster and promote entrepreneurship and innovation is essential to equip and enable our students to be ready for today's workforce."



Force for Good

Campaign Chair Franklin Farrow, '93, is the CEO and co-founder of Morning Pointe Senior Living. He believes his success as a Christian business owner is rooted in his time as a student in Southern's School of Business, and he is excited to help create new opportunities for the next generation of students.

"Equipping our students with innovative learning labs, a place of presence for sharing, and attracting quality teaching faculty is vital for the success of this major and ultimately Southern as a whole," Farrow said.

In the labs, students will be able to turn business theory into action and apply their knowledge to the real world. However, not all educational moments will occur in specific spaces. The new facility's generous footprint provides ample room for students to casually congregate

and communicate. Having areas that nurture organic networking and synergy is key as students learn that businesses are built on relationships.

The new School of Business is strategically positioned so that it is one of the first buildings a visitor to the campus will encounter, improving university visibility and simplifying community engagement. The convenient location, ample parking, and large meeting spaces will attract business professionals and further enhance the cross-pollination that occurs between students and local industry leaders.

To learn more, or to make a gift in support of the School of Business Leadership and Innovation Campaign, visit southern.edu/gobusiness. ■

by Angela (Ford) Baerg, '06



Equipping Kingdom Builders

I believe God calls people into business to show the world that they are excellent at getting the job done. They make good decisions and run efficient businesses. More importantly, though, I believe He calls them into business so that they can be kingdom builders in the marketplace. I am beyond blessed to say that each faculty member in Southern's School of Business has had time in the industry. God utilized them there before He called them here to teach and minister to students.

By God's grace, there will be a new School of Business building on Southern's campus. In the meantime, He continues to build us as faculty and administrators because we want to build students that He has anointed for business and for bringing people to Heaven. Thank you for supporting the campaign's vision and God's work in each of us—and each of our students—as He continues to prepare the world for His soon coming. ■

by Stephanie Sheehan, '05, PhD, dean, School of Business

One of the things I have cherished most about being here at Southern, and working in the School of Business, is being able to watch God call people into business. Yes, He calls them to be pastors, doctors, and teachers, but He also calls them to be businesspeople. Great businesspeople. That is why we are thrilled to name the new School of Business in honor of Ruth McKee, '26, for her servant leadership and missional mindset during the formative years of McKee Foods Corporation.

Real Money, Real Impact



Abigail Cornelius, senior finance major, utilizes the Bloomberg Finance Lab while doing research for Southern's SMARRT team.

STUDENTS MANAGE A MEANINGFUL PORTION OF SOUTHERN'S ENDOWMENT, LEARNING CRITICAL SKILLS BEFORE THEY ENTER THE WORKFORCE.

Elijah Hooker, '22, never dreamed he would have the opportunity to work with an investment portfolio of more than a half-million dollars before he even graduated, but in the last few years, Southern began offering its students a chance to manage 1% of the university's endowment under the supervision of faculty advisers. This collaboration between the Financial Administration office and the School of Business is called Student Managed Asset Risk and Return Training (SMARRT).

Small Group, Big Impact

SMARRT began as a five-student club in 2019, but since then, it has grown to more than 30 members. Together they analyze macroeconomic trends to construct a portfolio that closely reflects the market, with low turnover and a good balance between risk and return.

Every semester, members are divided into analyst teams of two to four people. Each group analyzes and reports on one of 11 sectors to the group at large, advising peers on whether to invest or divest. After teams have reported, the lead analyst and student executive team finalize investment decisions. SMARRT's long-term goal is to exceed a 4.5% return, honoring Southern's endowment policy commitments. In just three years, SMARRT has grown the fund from \$500,000 to more than \$600,000.

Hooker believes being a club member prepared him for his current job as an investment analyst with Smith + Howard, a national firm headquartered in Atlanta.

"There's a lot you can learn in terms of experience translatable to the workforce," he said. "At the end of the day, we're making decisions with real money that has a real impact."

Hooker particularly appreciated that he was able to take part in SMARRT for several semesters so that he could gain deeper experience with multiple investment cycles. His Smith + Howard supervisor, chief investment officer Brad Swinsburg, hasn't seen many job candidates come to the table with that kind of real-world experience.

"Frankly, it was one of the things that truly made him stick out," Swinsburg said. "Eli knew exactly what he was talking about. It has been a tremendous help to us to have someone who could come in and hit the ground running."

Faithful Stewards

Christian ethics are a guiding light for SMARRT investments. Because Southern and its SMARRT students analyze all opportunities through a Judeo-Christian biblical perspective, "sin stocks" such as gambling, pornography, alcohol, and tobacco are strictly off limits. Being true to their principles is especially

challenging during a recession. Since the larger, higher-performing portfolios almost always include sin stocks, Southern students must creatively seek alternate paths to profitability.

"We feel that it is important to be in the world and not of the world," said club president Max Harrison, a senior finance major. "We approach our investments with an emphasis on diversification, appropriate risk tolerance, and overall due diligence in our decision-making."

SMARRT members learn how to use tools such as the Bloomberg market analytics database and can take a course to earn Bloomberg certification. In August of 2022, the School of Business launched the new Bloomberg Finance Lab, making Southern a Bloomberg Experiential Learning Partner. This lab, sponsored by AdventHealth, contains 12 Bloomberg consoles where students access economic news, stock market indices, and financial information for any publicly traded company worldwide. Large, wall-mounted screens offer an up-to-the-minute view of current market news, as well. Southern is unique in allowing undergraduate students to use the Bloomberg Terminal, as most schools reserve it for graduate students.

"Only about 25% of universities and colleges our size have access to the Bloomberg Terminal or an opportunity to manage real investment funds," said SMARRT faculty adviser Braam Oberholster, DBA, the AdventHealth Endowed Chair for Business Administration. "Among



► Scan the QR code to view a video of Elijah Hooker, '22, discussing how working with the SMARRT team prepared him well for entering the workforce and helped him land a great job.

Adventist schools, we are the only school that I am aware of that has these types of facilities and portfolios available to its students."

Interdisciplinary Use

SMARRT seeks to involve students representing a variety of career interests across campus to gain a range of perspectives on the investment team. For example, senior business administration major Erick Baltodano hopes to use finance skills acquired from SMARRT in the field of physical therapy. When Charity Ogoti, '22, switched her major from biology to finance, joining the club helped her acclimate quickly to the world of business. Now a financial analyst at Fitch Ratings, Ogoti daily uses many of the skills she developed at SMARRT.

"It was an amazing experience, and it gave me that extra edge in applying for positions," Ogoti said.

Other club members have interned and started careers with companies such as Goldman Sachs, Fidelity Investments, and AdventHealth. This year, for the first time, five representatives from SMARRT participated in the Charter Financial Analyst Institute Research Challenge where they scored well on their analytical, valuation, presentation, and report-writing skills.

"Whether students plan on investing for a living or just in a personal way, understanding the market and how to invest wisely is a key life skill for all majors," Harrison said. "Club members come to understand that business touches every dimension in our lives." ■

by Angela (Ford) Baerg, '06

Different

BY DESIGN

Bob Jimenez, '87

BOB JIMENEZ, COX ENTERPRISES' SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT FOR CORPORATE AFFAIRS, SHARES HOW PRODUCT DIVERSIFICATION AND EMPLOYEE INCLUSION ARE CRITICAL COMPONENTS OF CORPORATE SUCCESS.

It used to be that a business needed just one original idea to succeed. Not anymore. Success today means evolving and innovating in a variety of sectors that can seem to have no common thread.

Portfolio diversification is the way to survive in a global economy rocked by constant pivots in customer demands, environmental and social concerns, and government regulations. Without it, few will survive. The operational culture of 100, 50, or even 20 years ago is no longer enough.

In the heart of Atlanta sits the corporate complex for Cox Enterprises, one of the largest private companies in America and the owner of multiple subsidiaries. With 55,000 employees and \$22 billion in annual revenues, the family-owned company has made a science of flexing to new opportunities and emerging technologies with an eye on its purpose to “empower people today to build a better future for the next generation.”

In addition to being the largest private broadband communications company in America, Cox operates a global used car auction and trade subsidiary that includes trusted brands such as AutoTrader and Kelley Blue Book; large daily newspapers in Dayton, Ohio, and in Atlanta; a tech company providing emission-free, organic, greenhouse-grown foods to metro areas; and the recently purchased Axios, a digital media platform.

Cox believes in making life better for its customers, its employees, and the communities where it does business, and it strives to demonstrate that making money and doing good are not mutually exclusive concepts. So, what does your used Audi A4 have in common with hydroponic-grown vine tomatoes and today’s local news headlines? Inclusion. Cox has embraced the concept in terms of both products and personnel, making it a matter of company culture, operations, and survival.



The Discovery Center at Cox Enterprises' headquarters in Atlanta showcases the people and products that have contributed to company success.

“We prioritize inclusion,” said Bob Jimenez, '87, senior vice president of Corporate Affairs at Cox Enterprises. “From top leadership down, we represent a wide variety of ideas, backgrounds, and perspectives.”

In fact, he believes that inclusion of differing perspectives is the only chance at disseminating balanced news coverage in a digital age when reporting is almost immediate. That inclusion trickles down to what business subsidiaries are bought or sold, how news is reported, and what philanthropic endeavors are supported.

“Diversity is about representation,” Jimenez said. “Equity is about fairness, but inclusion is the highest calling and is all about being accepted as you are, hearing and learning from as many points of view as possible. At Cox, we lead with inclusion.”

Jimenez has been a champion of inclusion from the start of his career with Cox two decades ago, after

cutting his teeth in public affairs for Walt Disney World. He joined Cox with a team of three and now leads 60 employees, directing and managing public affairs and corporate responsibility for the parent company and its subsidiaries. Recently voted as one of the most influential Latinos in America by *Hispanic Business* magazine, Jimenez’s love for the company and employees he serves easily shines through in general conversation. He is proud to represent the conglomerate founded 125 years ago that has anchored its future on social responsibility, and he believes his company’s culture today is what will make it successful in the future.

“Ten years from now,” he shared while looking across Atlanta’s skyline from offices above Cox’s sprawling green campus, “artificial intelligence will be the norm. We will operate as an avatar of ourselves in the digital space as easily as we navigate in our physical environment.”

Cox Enterprises is investing in that future now. In its Midtown satellite office, Cox hosts Techstars, a startup accelerator that accepts 10 entrepreneurial ventures each year to counsel and support for three months. It draws from a wide network of more than 100 business mentors, including Cox employees. Many of the companies they mentor are focused on innovation and targeted social entrepreneurship endeavors.

“One company we recently worked with is directly combating the issues of homelessness in our major cities through apartment sharing,” Jimenez said. “These are my favorite kinds of business ideas.”

Mentorship is what led Jimenez to his executive leadership role with one of the country’s media giants.

“We thrive when we engage with different perspectives and appreciate each other’s unique abilities.”

“I had no idea what I wanted to do when I graduated from Southern,” Jimenez admitted. “I didn’t know what my passion was yet.”

But through a mentor, he was introduced to the world of public relations, where he found his passion for community and inclusion. These core principles are apparent in his daily life as he easily chats up the barista at a downtown coffee shop, smiles at a fellow passenger in the elevator, shows genuine interest in the stories of visitors he meets, and laughs with employees while passing through the office.

From Cox’s Midtown satellite office, Jimenez can see Atlanta’s BeltLine, where 23 miles of former rail line are being converted into hiking and biking trails that chart a path right through the metro area. Its slogan? “Where Atlanta Comes Together.” Jimenez loves it. It represents what is best about Atlanta and about Cox Enterprises: inclusion. And it’s working. Buzzy restaurants, hangouts, and apartments are popping up around what used to be more dangerous parts of town.

“Inclusion is what is going to empower any team for sustainable, innovative success,” Jimenez said. “We thrive when we engage with different perspectives and appreciate each other’s unique abilities. This is what Cox Enterprises calls our Golden Thread and what we expect will take us into the next century of business pioneering.” ■

by Ellen Hostetler, vice president for Advancement, Southern Adventist University



Senior
Care

Staffing Crisis

MORE THAN 400,000 WORKERS LEFT THE LONG-TERM CARE FIELD FROM 2020-2022 IN AN UNPRECEDENTED EXODUS THAT HIGHLIGHTS THE NEED FOR SYSTEMATIC RECRUITING CHANGES WITHIN THE INDUSTRY.

Founding father John Adams famously said, “Every problem is an opportunity in disguise.” This aphorism resonates in the field of senior care—and in the classrooms at Southern Adventist University, where students pursuing degrees in Health Services and Senior Living Administration are, at a hands-on level, working through existing roadblocks to developing a robust workforce.

A recent article from *McKnights’ Long-Term Care News* paints this bleak picture of how employee deficits impact the field overall: “The current staffing crisis is the most challenging the senior care industry has ever experienced. It is leading to economic pressure on providers, burnout in the existing workforce, and likely poor health and well-being outcomes for older adults.”

“When we approach staffing with a culture of positivity, teamwork, and innovation, that’s when we find results.”

So, why is staffing such a challenge? One recent major cause is COVID-19. When the pandemic began, professionals in the skilled nursing industry were on the front line. Government guidelines and regulations of care requirements changed daily, sometimes hourly. This, coupled with long hours and a harsh media spotlight, led to an increased burnout rate for caregivers. Many in the industry, while caring for individuals most at-risk, were overworked and undervalued.

Another challenge is directly related to federal funding. According to an article from U.S. News & World Report, “Medicaid is the primary payer for the long stay nursing home residents who take up more than 80% of the beds in skilled nursing facilities.” Reimbursement is calculated using the government’s selected rate, which is not necessarily the real cost of care. This cost difference, generally more than 50%, must be made up by the facilities. As a result, nearly six out of 10 nursing home providers operate at a loss, according to results from a 2022 survey by the American Health Care Association and the National Center for Assisted Living.

Lastly, work in this industry has always held a bit of



a stigma. Traditional nursing homes are portrayed as smelly, cold, and institutional. Unfortunately, many view the staff working in these facilities as uneducated and disinterested. The reality of working in this industry, however, is that most positions require high skill levels, extensive educational licensing, and—most importantly—a heart for serving others that should be held in the highest of esteem.

Jeremy Stoner, ’96, nursing home administrator with NHC Healthcare, strongly believes that a cultural shift in attitudes will impact recruitment for careers in senior care.

“While rate of pay is always an issue, it is not necessarily the only issue,” Stoner said. “Police, fire, and rescue careers are not highly compensated, yet a large number of young people are going into those fields. If we help future caregivers understand that our work is as vital as emergency services, and treat them with similar levels of respect, we will succeed in attracting sufficient numbers of qualified professionals to long term care.”

Franklin Farrow, ’93, CEO of Independent Healthcare Properties LLC, has spent considerable time in recent years addressing staffing shortages. He echoes Stoner’s observations that non-monetary incentives are some of the most impactful.

“We, like others, have attempted to keep up by adjusting market rates for wages and offering sign-on bonuses,” Farrow said. “However, the most effective recruitment and retention strategies we’ve found include prioritizing work schedule flexibility, providing job duty specialization, and attempting to match cultural and life purposes in a way that satisfies an employee’s calling.”

And when it comes to calling, students desiring to align their faith with their vocation find clear support in the Bible for principles of long-term care: “Stand up in



“One key to combating staffing challenges is how we choose to approach each day,” said Ashley (Goulet) Borja, ’11, senior executive director for Life Care Center of Ooltewah (above, middle). “When we approach it with a culture of positivity, teamwork, and innovation, that’s when we find results. It’s up to us to create an environment of care and compassion for our associates.” Pictured with Borja are some of the other Southern alumni who serve at her facility. From left: Kelly (Caswell) Myers, ’01; Erin (Grube) Dos Santos, ’15; Allie (Johnson) Center, ’19; and Bree Macri, ’23.

the presence of the aged, show respect for the elderly, and revere your God. I am the Lord” (Leviticus 19:32, NIV).

How can the other challenges identified earlier become opportunities? From a purely numbers standpoint, the industry—and Southern Adventist University, which offers degrees in the field—is on solid footing to encourage individuals toward a future in the senior care industry where the Bureau of Labor Statistics expects job growth for medical and health services managers to increase 28% during the next decade.

A market outlook that bright typically attracts degree seekers with an eye on tomorrow, but for students living in the here and now, the 1,000 hours of internships required by accrediting agencies can be daunting. Especially when most of those hours are without compensation. The economic burden of paying for food, lodging, and tuition while completing vast amounts of unpaid internship hours presents a significant challenge for students interested in the field.

A new organization, Vision Center, is developing connections between providers and universities, such as Southern, to create 25 programs that lead to paid internships within the senior care industry. Paid internships for those interested in leadership positions within the skilled nursing industry provide a much-needed incentive for students considering these programs.

Additionally, the Health Services and Senior Living Administration program within Southern’s School of Business recently received commitments from two industry partners to begin providing paid internships for 650 of the 1,000 required hours. While this still leaves 350 hours as unpaid, it is a meaningful improvement.

Southern’s Health Services and Senior Living Administration major was the first such program in Tennessee, and it is the only one in the state accredited by the National Association of Long Term Care Administrator Boards. Alumni and other *MarketPlace* readers are encouraged to become ambassadors for the field, sharing industry growth projections and other value propositions with those considering career decisions.

Southern also invites readers to support the placement of Christ-centered business leaders in this critical field by prayerfully considering new scholarship possibilities and the potential for additional paid internships. To learn more, please call 423.236.2680. ■

by Lisa Kuhlman, ’10, program director for Health Services and Senior Living Administration, Southern Adventist University

Business as Mission

INTERNATIONAL STUDY AND SERVICE-LEARNING WORK ABROAD ARE JUST TWO OF THE TRANSFORMATIVE TOOLS THAT SOUTHERN'S SCHOOL OF BUSINESS USED TO SHARPEN MY FOCUS AND CHANGE MY UNDERSTANDING OF CALLING.

Arriving at Southern in 2018, I knew that I wanted to pursue a career in business and that I was a Christian, but I wasn't exactly sure how one factor influenced the other. Thankfully, my Southern journey has included countless opportunities to explore that question in a safe but challenging atmosphere. It didn't take long before I became involved in many different School of Business functions. I joined the China Study Tour led by Professor Braam Oberholster, DBA, where we had the opportunity to visit many different factories and businesses. I also was able to study for a semester at Newbold College in England. These trips gave me a love for travel and international business, helping me realize that our world is so much bigger than the bubbles we stay comfortable in at home. This new global perspective taught me much about humility, something I would need in spades as my training in "business as mission" took its next step.



Professional Growth

Another School of Business program I engaged with was Enactus, a global organization with campus teams of social entrepreneurs who use what they are learning in the classroom to develop projects that improve people's livelihoods. After participating in entry-level roles, I was asked to be the club's president during my junior year.

Two months into that tenure, Professor Michelle Doucoumes, faculty sponsor of Enactus, received an email from Riverside Farm Institute in Zambia. This model farm had recently begun making bars of natural, affordable soap that would help equip women and young people to open their own businesses. This project is called Akuna Soap Industry, inspired by the local Zambian phrase "Akuna Sesipala," which means "nothing is impossible with God."

Riverside was wondering if Enactus would be willing to help raise funds to support business expansion through construction of a new soap factory. After discussing the idea with my team of Enactus student leaders, we decided to take on this project. With the help of community donors, we raised more than \$100,000 that year for factory construction and the purchase of commercial equipment. Akuna Soap went from mixing the ingredients in small batches with a handheld power tool and an old tire to mixing them in an industrial-sized machine. You can learn more—and buy some soap!—at akunasoap.org.



Ashley Blake's experiences in Zambia (top) and China (bottom) broadened both her business worldviews and cultural perspectives.



Personal Growth

While fundraising for this project, I was greatly inspired by the work being done in Zambia. Part of me had always felt the call to serve as a student missionary for a year, especially after I had experienced a taste of travel through the School of Business' international trips, but I never committed because the available missionary responsibilities didn't resonate deeply enough with me. However, once I saw the opportunity to work alongside the Zambians firsthand with this soap business, I couldn't resist the Holy Spirit's leading any longer. I immediately signed up to spend my next year as a business student missionary in Africa.

I knew that I'd need an abundance of patience and prayer to help make the Akuna Soap Industry successful and sustainable. I pulled from lessons learned in my business classes to help create a better accounting system for Akuna Soap. I pulled from the leadership lessons learned while participating in Enactus to create a cohesive team and ensure that we all had roles that were suited to our talents.

Most importantly, I pulled from my relationship with God to help me get through the difficult moments that any student missionary faces while serving abroad. This helped me begin to foster a deeper appreciation for "business as mission" while in Zambia.

“He was showing me my role as His hands and feet.”

Almost every day I met someone who might be impacted by my actions, and I started to see God's hand in those interactions. He was showing me my role as His hands and feet. Some days I assisted a group of Zambian ladies from the local village, who were interested in learning how to sell our soap in their small shop but needed financial help getting started. On another day, I met a mother visiting from Lusaka, the Zambian capital, purchasing her 10th box of soap because she had already grown her own customer base and had been successfully using the profits to put herself through college.

As I prepared to graduate, the meaning behind "business as mission" became increasingly clear: live out your relationship with Christ in a way that everyone you meet as part of your business activities can see Jesus working through you. Southern's School of Business helped me to learn this and has inspired me to apply these lessons in the sacred spaces of whatever workplace my future holds. ■

by Ashley Blake, '23, School of Business graduate

Count
Your

Blessings

FINANCE PROFESSOR SEES PROVIDENCE IN FAMILY'S
EXPEDITED TRANSITION FROM LEBANON TO TENNESSEE.

In the span of a second, Joelle Akiki watched her 7-year-old son, James, fly backward through the air. Shards of window glass collapsed onto him, rapidly followed by a heavy curtain rod and other debris.

More than 200 people died after that massive explosion in Beirut, Lebanon, on August 4, 2020. Thankfully, James was not one of them. Akiki held him in her arms following the blast, which damaged over half of the city, repeatedly calling his name, unable to think while crouched within her home that was now destroyed. As the minutes passed, however, she realized that James was alright with not a single scratch on him. This was the first in a series of miracles.

“What I saw outside—you wouldn’t believe someone could survive,” Akiki said. “James was saved by the angels.”

Akiki and her family decided to leave the Middle East, in part as a result of the blast. She completed her DBA degree from Beirut Arab University and, in August 2022, arrived in Collegedale to begin teaching for Southern Adventist University’s School of Business.

Akiki grew up in a devout Maronite Catholic home in Lebanon. As a teenager, she aspired to become a surgeon, but knew her family could not afford medical school. Her supervisor recognized this, and during a college orientation, he encouraged Akiki to apply to Middle East University, a nearby Seventh-day Adventist school, where she could study business. She followed his advice, and at the university she met fellow student Larry Barkanian. He encouraged her to learn more about Adventism, and what might have seemed like a gentle nudge to onlookers was a strong knocking on Akiki’s heart.

“It was a calling,” Akiki stated. “I really was lost, and then I was found.”

She began studying the Bible. Her parents questioned her decision to embrace Adventism and approached their priests, curious about the strange religion and wondering how they could stop their daughter from straying.

One priest told Akiki’s dad: “If this is where she has found herself, you need to let go. You shouldn’t stand in her way, because Adventists are very good people. They pray more than we do.”

“After that, my dad became more lenient,” Akiki recalled. “It was easier.”

Akiki was baptized into the Seventh-day Adventist Church a year later. Her parents declined to attend, but they grew to accept her decision. It helped that they and Akiki’s older brothers got along with Barkanian, whom she eventually married.

Life Turned Upside-Down

Akiki and her husband now have three children: 9-year-old James, 6-year-old Peter, and 4-year-old Katelyn. Their daughter was only a year old when the blast destroyed their home in Beirut.

Following that tragedy, the family knew they couldn’t live in Lebanon anymore. It was too unstable.

“The extreme political unrest and devaluation of currency there led to lots of changes,” Akiki said. “It’s constant disaster after disaster.”

In May 2022, Akiki’s friend told her about an open faculty position at Southern. She prayed deeply about



Joelle Akiki, DBA

the opportunity and, with no expectations, submitted her application. That same day she received an email from Stephanie Sheehan, '05, PhD, dean of Southern's School of Business, requesting an interview. In June, just as she and her husband arrived at Andrews University in Michigan for a conference, she received the job offer.

Akiki saw God at work in the invitation and accepted. Upon returning home, the couple immediately began working on the legal logistics of moving to Tennessee.

"It's hard to get official papers done in Lebanon because of riots, the revolution, the pandemic; they caused closures to several important places, like the Ministry of Education," Akiki explained.

The couple struggled in what often felt like a hopeless situation, but God consistently turned the impossible into the possible.

"Things just unfolded in front of our eyes," Akiki said. "We saw miracle after miracle. God overcame."

One day she was discouraged to hear that she couldn't get an interview with the embassy to receive her visa until March 2023, thus preventing her from accepting the job at Southern.

At 8 a.m. the next morning, however, the embassy called her and told her they could shorten the timeframe and interview in October. That was fine, Akiki responded, but then, before hanging up, she told them she'd like to start work in August for the Fall 2022 semester instead of waiting until winter. After two very long minutes, the embassy called back and said they'd opened up a spot for her the next morning.

When she arrived for the interview, Akiki learned that the embassy needed almost \$12,000 to expedite her family's visa process. The couple was supposed to pay that day, but the cashier was out of the office, giving the family through the weekend to sell their belongings and come up with the exact amount needed.

Professor Akiki (left) and her family felt God's hand in bringing them to serve at Southern Adventist University.



"I remind students of the things they take for granted, and my story gives me the opportunity to initiate such discussions."

On July 25, the family received their visas. With 14 suitcases and two backpacks, they traveled to the United States on August 1. If they had left one day later, the kids' passports would have expired.

The Right Choice

The family arrived in Chattanooga at midnight, where they were picked up and welcomed by Sheehan with hugs and a basket of goodies in their hotel. The next day, Akiki attended Southern's new employee orientation.

"And ever since then, I've been working," Akiki said, laughing.

With 19 aunts and uncles and more than 50 cousins in Lebanon, it was not easy for Akiki to leave the country. But now that she is part of Southern's faculty, she knows that she and her husband made the right choice.

"I am growing professionally, and I am growing spiritually," she said. "I pray for my family more. I meditate more. I have time to think of things other than if there's electricity or enough water to do laundry. We have time to ourselves as a family; this change has been a true blessing."

Akiki loves her teaching job and expressed how the cheerful and giving atmosphere in the School of Business has exceeded expectations. She is thankful for the students and faculty, who have embraced her and shown exceptional kindness.

"If I have a question at any time, I can walk into another professor's office," Akiki said. "My coworkers are always ready to help. I've made good friends."

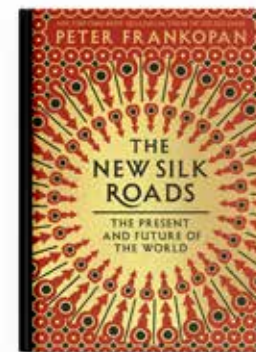
Akiki, who holds a master's degree in finance and a doctorate in business administration, believes her background and experience make her a better teacher. When curriculum and conversations involve the economics of developing countries, her perspective as someone who struggled living in the Middle East is invaluable.

"I'm proud of the stories I have; I've been transformed by them," Akiki said. "I remind students of the things they take for granted, and my story gives me the opportunity to initiate such discussions. I always tell them—and it's become my motto—'Count your blessings.'" ■

by Amanda Blake, senior journalism major



SOUTHERN'S SCHOOL OF BUSINESS TEAM SHARES WHAT BOOKS THEY'RE READING RIGHT NOW THAT INFLUENCE HOW THEY TEACH.



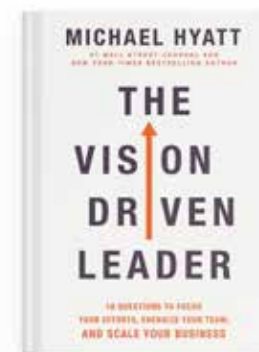
To complement my understanding of international business and the shift eastward of the economic center of gravity in the world, I read *The Silk Roads: A New History of the World* by Peter Frankopan. Currently, I'm reading his follow-up book that shifts focus from the historical to the current, *The Present and Future of the World*.

—Braum Oberholster, DBA, Professor



I'm really enjoying *Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die* by Chip and Dan Heath. It's providing me with a lot of ideas about how to make my lectures more "sticky." By that I mean, how can I engage students better so they will enjoy the course more and retain material at a higher level? Every chapter feels like it contains ideas I can apply directly in the classroom.

—Ben Schnell, '09, Assistant Professor



I'm currently reading *The Vision Driven Leader* by Michael Hyatt. Vision, mission, and strategy are all critical elements, yet none stands alone. The best results are in the sweet spot of overlap.

—Stephanie Sheehan, '05, PhD, Dean

I know this answer is cheating (you can't read a podcast) but every semester that I teach our Intro to Business course, I ask my students to join me in a careful listening of the *Wall Street Journal* podcast *Bad Bets*, specifically episodes about Enron. This generation has never heard of that scandal or what it meant to those working in accounting and finance.

—Lisa Kuhlman, '10, Associate Professor



A TASTE OF SOUTHERN

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 28 | 6 P.M.
THE CHATTANOOGAN HOTEL

Gala Featuring

Renowned Tenor David Phelps
with Southern Adventist University's Symphony Orchestra



Supporting first-generation student endowed scholarships
Tickets: southern.edu/taste | 423.236.2829

